



# ACCESS CURRENTS

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## Advisory Committee Presents Report on Courthouse Access

The Courthouse Access Advisory Committee, which the Board organized to promote accessibility in the design of court facilities, presented its recommendations at a meeting of the Board on November 15<sup>th</sup>. The Committee's report, "Justice for All: Designing Accessible Courthouses," provides design guidance and best practice recommendations for achieving access in courthouses, including courtrooms. It also includes outreach and educational strategies for disseminating this information most effectively to various audiences.

Over the course of its two-year charter, the Committee examined design issues in depth, toured different types of courthouses across the country, and crafted solutions that ensure access without compromising traditional features essential to courthouse design. A leading focus of the Committee was access to courtrooms, which feature a variety of elevated spaces, including witness stands, jury boxes, and judges' benches. The report includes detailed recommendations on providing access to these and other courthouse spaces. This guidance is applicable to all types of courthouses at all levels of government. While focused on the design of new facilities, the report also can be used as a resource in the retrofit of existing facilities.



Members of the Courthouse Access Advisory Committee

The Committee's 35 members included courthouse architects, disability groups, members of the judiciary, court administrators, representatives of the codes community and standard-setting entities, government agencies, and others with an interest in the issues to be explored. Committee representatives, including Co-Chairs Eve Hill of the Disability Rights Legal Center and Sam Overton, Deputy Attorney General for the State of California, outlined key findings and recommendations of the report in a presentation to the Board.

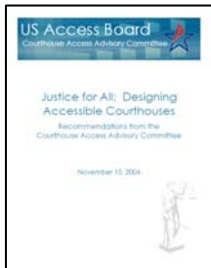
Access to courthouses remains a problem, even in the design of new facilities, due to a lack of information and awareness. Design features essential to courthouses, particularly courtrooms, pose challenges to access that are not adequately addressed by existing resources. The Committee's report, according to Board Chair and Deputy Administrator of the General Services Administration (GSA) David L. Bibb, promises to positively influence the next generation of courthouses by demonstrating how access for all users can be easily met. "I am confident, thanks to the work of this Committee, that future courthouses will fulfill the promise that justice for all means access for all," Bibb noted.

The Committee's recommendations will supplement accessibility guidelines the Board maintains under the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Architectural Barriers Act. Although these guidelines contain provisions specific to courtrooms, many have sought further guidance on how access can best be achieved. The report also contains an outreach and education plan for the Board's use in disseminating this new guidance and promoting greater awareness.

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The Committee held meetings in Phoenix, Chicago, San Francisco, Miami, Boston, and Washington, D.C. In developing its recommendations, the Committee followed a consensus-based model according to protocols governing Federal advisory committees. Three subcommittees organized by the Committee covering courtrooms, courthouse spaces other than courtrooms, and education and outreach met extensively in between quarterly committee meetings.



### *Report Highlights*

The Committee's report includes recommendations that address:

- Integrating accessibility into all stages of courthouse design and planning;
- Courthouse and courtroom entrances, including automated devices that facilitate access through heavy or monumental doors;
- Access solutions to judges' benches that preserve the security and dignity afforded justices;
- Effective and economical solutions for providing access to raised witness stands, jury boxes, and clerks' stations without disruption to court proceedings;
- Assistive listening technologies that discretely enhance audio output for people who are hard of hearing;
- Wheelchair seating in spectator areas;
- Incorporating access solutions into standard design plans for various types of courtrooms, including jury, bankruptcy/ hearing, magistrate, appeals, special proceeding;
- Signage and wayfinding systems that facilitate access throughout courthouses for people with vision impairments;
- Counters and other elements of public service areas;
- Jury deliberation rooms and jury assembly rooms;
- Secured areas, including judges' chambers and suites;
- Holding cells serving courtrooms; and
- Outreach and education strategies for disseminating this information and raising awareness.

### *Courtroom Mock-Up*

In addition to receiving the Committee's report, the Board visited a full-scale courtroom mock-up organized by GSA and the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts (AOC). The mock-ups, which were based on sample courtroom plans prepared by AOC, provided a means to test and evaluate some of the Committee's recommendations. Board and Committee members toured a mock-up of a standard district courtroom, which was reconfigured to represent a special proceedings courtroom. Later mock-up configurations of another district courtroom design and a magistrate courtroom were made available for review in early December.



The district courtroom mock-ups included a judge's bench, clerk stations, a witness stand and other raised elements that were accessed by ramps.

Further information on the committee is available on the Board's website at [www.access-board.gov/caac/index.htm](http://www.access-board.gov/caac/index.htm).

#### **2007 Research & TA Agenda**

- Trail Surfaces
- State Access Code Implementation
- Exterior Doors
- Courthouse Access
- Wheeled Mobility
- Play Surfacing
- Museum Access
- Wheelchair Transfer
- Audible Alarms
- Door Pulls for Stalls

## **Board Adopts 2007 Research and Technical Assistance Priorities**

The Board sponsors and coordinates research to develop guidance materials, advance work on guidelines under review or development, and promote accessible design. Each year, the Board initiates a variety of projects, often in cooperation with other entities. Most projects focus on the study of accessibility in relation to architecture and design, human factors, communication, and transportation. At its November meeting, the Board approved research and technical assistance priorities for 2007 subject to the availability of funds.

Two projects will further research on accessible surfacing for outdoor trails and play areas. A study is currently underway by the National Center on Accessibility on the accessibility of trail surfaces, and the Board plans to provide additional support to expand this project. The Board's guidelines for play areas reference industry standards for accessible surfaces issued by the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM). The Board seeks to initiate research to help develop protocols and standards for measuring play surface accessibility in accordance with the ASTM standard.

A new type of project on the agenda is intended to promote compliance with design requirements through the development of best practice recommendations for the implementation and enforcement of state and model accessibility codes. Human factors research is also on the list. The Board plans to continue support for a major multi-year project to collect data on human measures and wheeled mobility by the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Universal Design and the Built Environment. The Board has contributed to this project over the past four years, and additional funds are to be provided to support final phases of data collection that will result in a database of measures from 500 subjects. Another project on the agenda will review existing research on wheelchair transfer to identify areas where further study is needed.

Other projects include the development of guidance materials on courthouse accessibility based on recommendations from the Board's Courthouse Access Advisory Committee and studies of exterior doors, museum exhibits, audible alarms, and door hardware for toilet stall doors. These priorities will be undertaken to the extent that funding permits. Where possible, the Board seeks to undertake research in partnership with other organizations or to build upon existing projects in order to maximize available opportunities with limited funds. For further information on these projects or other aspects of the Board's research program, contact Lois Thibault, the Board's research coordinator, at [research@access-board.gov](mailto:research@access-board.gov) (e-mail), (202) 272-0023 (voice), (202) 272-0082 (TTY), or visit the Board's website at [www.access-board.gov/research.htm](http://www.access-board.gov/research.htm).

## **Advisory Panel on the 508 Standards Refresh Holds Second Meeting**

The Telecommunications and Electronic and Information Technology Advisory Committee (TEITAC), which will provide recommendations to the Board on updating the section 508 standards for electronic and information technology and guidelines for telecommunications products, held its second meeting November 8 and 9 in Washington, D.C. The committee discussed a variety of topics, including access for people with cognitive disabilities, emerging products, existing standards, testability, and other topics. The committee also heard progress reports from representatives of its eight subcommittees which cover different subject areas, such as web and software, audio/ video, telecommunications, and general interface. In addition, presentations were made on accessibility efforts among states, research underway on accessible information and telecommunication technology, and web-based tools to facilitate the work of the committee, including an interactive website at <http://teitac.org> with wiki functions.

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The next committee meeting is scheduled for February 6 – 8, 2007. Subcommittees meet regularly in between committee meetings by teleconference and circulate information through listservs and the committee's website, which includes a calendar of subcommittee and committee events. For further information, visit <http://teitac.org> or contact Timothy Creagan of the Access Board at [creagan@access-board.gov](mailto:creagan@access-board.gov), (202) 272-0016 (v), or (202) 272-0082 (TTY).

## **GSA Releases Survey Checklist for Leased Facilities**

The General Services Administration (GSA) has released a checklist based on new accessibility standards that take effect for federally leased facilities early next year. The Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) Accessibility Standards, which are based on guidelines issued by the Board, contain provisions specific to leased facilities. The standards address access to joint-use areas, accessible routes to primary function areas, restrooms, and other spaces and elements. The checklist provides a tool to assess compliance with the standards for newly leased space. The new standards will apply to facilities leased by GSA through solicitations issued after February 6, 2007.

The standards previously took effect for new construction and alterations (May 8, 2006) and for constructed-for-lease projects (June 30, 2006). GSA's standards apply to most Federal facilities except postal facilities, which are covered by similar standards adopted by the U.S. Postal Service, and military facilities and housing facilities, which are subject to standards maintained by the Department of Defense and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Information on the accessibility requirements for GSA leased facilities and the checklist is available on GSA's website at [www.gsa.gov/leasing](http://www.gsa.gov/leasing). Information on the status of updated standards issued under the ABA or the Americans with Disabilities Act is posted on the Board's website at [www.access-board.gov/ada-aba/index.htm](http://www.access-board.gov/ada-aba/index.htm).

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